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SUBJECT: A/S FRIED'S VISIT TO BOSNIA

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas L. McElhaney. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

Summary

11. (C) During his April 3-5 visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUR Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried conveyed a message of strong U.S. support for Bosnia's path to Europe. He urged political leaders to seize current opportunities to finalize constitutional and police reforms, thereby cementing Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic future by making a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) possible. A/S Fried emphasized that Kosovo independence is inevitable and warned Serb leaders that it will not constitute a precedent for the Republika Srpska (RS). He delivered a stern message to Bosniak Presidency member Haris Silajdzic that his recent nationalist rhetoric is becoming dangerous and destabilizing and could have tragic consequences. Silajdzic remained provocative and intransigent, denouncing Dayton and the Republika Srpska as legitimizing genocide, and openly stating his intention to block constitutional and police reforms. Other political leaders (Nikola Radmanovic and Milorad Dodik (SNSD), Sulejman Tihic (SDA) and Zeljko Komsic (SDP)) expressed varying degrees of support for the U.S.-brokered March package of constitutional reforms and flexibility on their approach to police reform. With the exception of Silajdzic, all interlocutors acknowledged the urgency of the SAA timeline and expressed concern over the recent rise in nationalism in Bosnian politics.

12. (U) Summary continued: During his visit to Bosnia, A/S Fried met with, inter alia, members of the Serb Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) including party president and RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, State Prime Minister Nikola Spiric and Tri-Presidency Nebojsa Radmanovic. Fried met with Bosniak nationalist Party for BiH (SBiH) President Haris Silajdzic and Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj. Fried also met with Socialist-leaning Social Democratic Party (SDP) Presidency member Zeljko Komsic and moderate Bosniak Party for Democratic Action (SDA) leader Sulejman Tihic. End Summary.

Nationalism and the Future of Bosnia

13. (C) A/S Fried underscored to all interlocutors that Dayton, despite its imperfections, is the operative basis for the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and cannot be challenged. Emphasizing that the language of nationalism and victimhood infecting political discourse in Bosnia is dangerous and could lead to violence, A/S Fried conveyed a particularly stern message to Bosniak Tri-Presidency Member and Party for BiH (SBiH) President Haris Silajdzic that his rhetoric of moral absolutes and perfect justice will do nothing to advance Bosniak interests.

14. (C) A/S Fried opened a private meeting with Haris Silajdzic by conveying his astonishment at the character of Silajdzic's rhetoric, including his disparagement of Dayton and calls for the abolition of the RS. Silajdzic was myopically focused on the recent International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict and deployed surprisingly confrontational rhetoric. Silajdzic compared the Republika Srpska (RS) to Nazi Germany and called openly for the abolition of Dayton and the RS as a "product of fascism and genocide." A/S Fried pointed out that such language can easily result in disastrous consequences including the resumption of conflict. Silajdzic replied that he is in "deep disagreement" with the United States. He restated that the recent ICJ verdict had brought the genocidal history of the RS into focus and that anything short of the abolishment the entities would be equivalent to asking Bosniaks to reconcile with Milosevic. The verdict now obliged him to reject Dayton as illegal under international law. Silajdzic rejected any characterization of his position as nationalist, stating that Bosniaks are entitled to a minimum of justice. Silajdzic also denied he is empowering Islamic fundamentalists in Bosnia claiming instead he had been attacked by such forces because of his secular outlook. Unlike Serbs who have Serbia and Croats who have Croatia, Bosnian Muslims feel isolated and the ICJ decision has precipitated a spontaneous display of frustration. Silajdzic urged the U.S. to support current efforts to establish special status for Srebrenica as a means to demonstrate to the world that it is "not against Muslims." Silajdzic claimed he was in fact trying to prevent an upsurge in Islamic fundamentalism by serving as a "safety valve" for

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Bosniak grievances.

15. (C) When Silajdzic began to embark on a catalog of examples of how the U.S. failed Bosniaks during the war, A/S Fried interjected that the historical record was clear and that Srebrenica had precipitated the U.S. military involvement in the Bosnian war; accusations that the U.S. has abandoned Bosnian Muslims were groundless and offensive. A/S Fried urged Silajdzic to think carefully about his language and course of action. Fried told Silajdzic that the United States recognized the Bosniaks as the most aggrieved party during the war and, as a result, twelve years of U.S. policy had focused on reforms that would improve life for the Bosniaks. However, Silajdzic's recent actions were making him part of the problem, not the solution, and threatened to jeopardize relations between the Bosniaks and the United States. A/S Fried asked Silajdzic whether in blocking reform he had a strategic bottom line or if his agenda was purely destructive. Silajdzic replied that he did have a bottom line but refused to explain it.

Dodik: Reaching out to Srebrenica

16. (C) In Banja Luka, RS Prime Minister Milorad discussed the ICJ verdict and rejected the possibility of Srebrenica's secession from the RS, but both he and RS National Assembly Speaker Igor Radojicic highlighted the need for economic reform there. Dodik said that his government was prepared to declare Srebrenica a "zone of special attention" for development and to invest USD 10.6 million there over the coming year to address economic and social needs, including electrification and road building. Dodik also expressed sensitivity to the role of the police in Srebrenica following the ICJ verdict. Moreover, he said that he had asked both the RS and BiH prosecutors for a list of names of those suspected of participation in Srebrenica war crimes, pledging to suspend any suspects still involved in public service, even before formal court processes. Finally, Dodik pledged

that an ethnic Bosniak would be installed in one of the two top police positions in Srebrenica, either as police chief or police commissioner.

FM Alkalaj Vouches for Silajdzic

¶7. (C) During his meeting with Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj (SBIH), A/S Fried noted that Silajdzic's nationalism and willingness to hold the SAA hostage was beginning to jeopardize Bosnia's future. A/S Fried emphasized that, unless he altered course, Silajdzic's professed determination to abolish Dayton would eventually bring him into open conflict with the United States and negatively impact bilateral relations. The inevitable outcome of Silajdzic's approach would be to increase the influence in Bosnia of Wahabbis and Salafists seeking to use the country as an outpost in Europe. FM Alkalaj stressed that he has known Silajdzic for years and vouched for his friendship towards the United States and his firm democratic orientation. Bosnia is "not fertile ground" for radical Islam and Silajdzic is not "preaching for the mullahs," Alkalaj said. Nonetheless, Alkalaj undertook to emphasize the seriousness of U.S. concerns with Silajdzic.

PM Spiric Laments "Politics of Spite"

¶8. (C) Prime Minister Nikola Spiric emphasized his personal commitment, and that of his party, to upholding Dayton which had yielded "fantastic results" for Bosnia over the last eleven years. Spiric worried that nationalism is on the rise and that voices seeking to annul Dayton are contributing to this trend. He lamented that growing nationalism has resulted in a "politics of spite" with Federation-based parties decrying economic progress in the RS and Serbs, in turn, citing this as evidence that they are unwelcome in Bosnia. Spiric stated that the cause of Serb identity is a lost one and that all citizens of Bosnia should work towards progress of the country as a whole. Spiric added that there are responsible leaders in Bosnia, on all sides, who genuinely seek the betterment of the country. He asked that the United States work to empower these Bosnian patriots at all levels of government and to distinguish them from nationalists.

OHR: A UN Role to Temper Bosniak Emotions?

¶9. (C) In a discussion with Acting High Representative Gregorian of OHR's work, Fried underscored the importance of

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more robust engagement from OHR over the next year to push the reform agenda and undercut growing nationalism. PDHR Gregorian expressed concern about events in and over Srebrenica since the ICJ verdict. He said that the international community had underestimated the emotional impact the verdict would have on Bosniaks and was worried that Silajdzic's line that "no one did anything in response to the verdict" was resonating among Bosniaks. To lower the political temperature and take some of the sting out of Silajdzic's charge, PDHR suggested the UN take some action. This might involve a statement from the UNSC Presidency acknowledging the verdict, condemning the genocide, and urging Serbia to turn over Mladic and Karadzic to The Hague. Alternatively, it might involve the formation of a "Blue Ribbon Commission" of eminent jurists to look into the ruling and determine what steps might be taken as a consequence of it.

Constitutional Reform

¶10. (C) At a roundtable on constitutional reform with the leaders of all coalition parties, A/S Fried emphasized that

the U.S. stands ready to help Bosnia reform its constitution but Bosnian leaders must demonstrate the political will to conclude the process. Party leaders staked out familiar positions on the March package. Haris Silajdzic rejected it outright, Dodik restated SNSD support with the provision that it not be reopened for negotiation, and Sulejman Tihic (SDA) offered a tepid endorsement, referring to the need for unspecified compromises. At the Presidency, with Nikola Radmanovic (SNSD) and Zeljko Komsic (SDP) both expressed support for a prominent U.S. role in constitutional reform and Haris Silajdzic again restated his determination to block reform if it did not eliminate qualified majority entity voting, repeating past calls to reopen the package for review by constitutional lawyers and experts.

Spiric: Existing Amendment Package Still has Legs

11. (C) Prime Minister Nikola Spiric (SNSD) reiterated his party's strong support for the March package and emphasized his conviction that successful constitutional reform is critical to Bosnia's European future but that "nationalists on all sides" are seeking to derail it. Spiric said he was troubled that increasing polarization and nationalism has resulted in a political environment in which compromise is seen as "national betrayal." However, he expressed confidence that if the package of amendments were to be reintroduced in the future it would be possible to generate the necessary two-thirds majority in Parliament. Spiric promised to continue to advocate for passage of the first package and to maintain a constructive approach to subsequent phases. Spiric suggested that, if the March package were reintroduced into Parliament by the Presidency, it would eventually be possible to enlist full SDS and SDP support. Spiric said he was confident that if both parties felt sufficiently exposed they would vote in favor of the package.

Silajdzic: "It's the Entity Voting, Stupid"

12. (C) During a private afternoon coffee, A/S Fried told Haris Silajdzic that constitutional reform was crucial in order to move Bosnia away from ethnic blockage to functioning European nationhood. Silajdzic replied that the elimination of entity voting was his bottom line and he would not support amendments (i.e. the first package) that left it in place. Silajdzic asserted that the amendments were "harmful to Bosnia" and deepened the ethnic divisions created by genocide. Entity voting allowed a small majority of Serbs to dissolve Parliament and precipitate new elections, a provision not foreseen in Dayton. Silajdzic asked how can Bosniaks be expected to accept such a formulation. Supporters of the March package make the Serbs stronger and, by extension, are supporting genocide, Silajdzic said. Adding that "I am the leader of the Bosniaks," Silajdzic repeated that he would never accept a reform package that would again result in Serb domination.

13. (C) A/S Fried pointed out that the March package will weaken the premises of the RS. Constitutional reform must necessarily be a long process and United States is committed to subsequent phases of reform where these issues can be resolved but the process must begin somewhere. Silajdzic stated flatly that he did not believe U.S. statements about subsequent reforms and feared a second phase would never come. The March package would consolidate the status of the

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RS and give the Serbs no motivation to return to the table. Both Silajdzic and Alkalaj returned to long-standing demands that the March package be reopened for revision by constitutional lawyers. A/S Fried replied that if the input of experts was the political cover necessary for SBiH support it would be acceptable but only if the political will existed to reach agreement in the end. The Ambassador reminded

Silajdzic that SBiH had abandoned negotiations for the March package and had lost an important opportunity to influence its content. When asked by A/S Fried whether he could support the package if it removed parliamentary blockage provisions without eliminating entity voting, Silajdzic evaded the question returning to a litany of historical Bosniak grievances.

Police Reform

¶14. (C) During each of his meetings, A/S Fried reiterated the urgency of completing police reform in order to pave the way for the signing of an SAA with the EU. He stressed that Kosovo has focused the EU on the Balkans and that 2007 presents a unique window of opportunity for Bosnia's SAA prospects. This opportunity will not present itself again soon and police reform must be concluded before the window closes.

Silajdzic Demands Elimination of "Genocidal" RS Police

¶15. (C) PM Spiric stated that, like defense reform, the necessary changes to the police structure were possible and his SNSD is committed to compromise. At the Presidency, Radmanovic and Komsic repeated their parties' willingness to sign on to a police reform agreement. Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj acknowledged that a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) is crucial for the future of Bosnia and claimed that both he and Silajdzic are determined to achieve the reforms necessary for the conclusion of an SAA. Alkalaj asserted that the current impediment to police reform was a semantic one that could be overcome in time. However, during his private meeting with A/S Fried, Silajdzic repeated intention to continue to block the measure as long as the agreement continues to refer to the "genocidal" RS police. Silajdzic stated outright that, regardless of the consequences to the SAA, he will never agree a national police structure that maintains the term RS police which is a "product of ethno-fascism."

Bosnians Serbs Open to Talk, Compromise

¶16. (C) In Banja Luka, RS Premier Milorad Dodik told A/S Fried that he welcomed USG engagement on all reforms and pledged openness to continued negotiations. On police reform, Dodik said that the RS was willing for its police to be "a part of" a state-level police structure, but that interlocutors in the Federation had opposed this. RS National Assembly Speaker Igor Radojicic struck a similar tone, saying that police reform according to the EU's three principles was a necessity, but that police reform should not be used as constitutional reform by another means.

Kosovo

¶17. (C) A/S Fried emphasized to all interlocutors that Kosovo independence is inevitable and will have no impact on the integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia. He emphasized to both FM Alkalaj and PM Spiric that Kosovo final status will in no way constitute a precedent for the RS. FM Alkalaj worried that continued discussions of referenda by PM Milorad Dodik would continue to provoke radicalism within both Serb and Bosniak constituencies. PM Spiric agreed that there is "no relation" between the status of Kosovo and the RS. All citizens of Bosnia should focus on the future of the country regardless of regional developments. Spiric said he regretted any misunderstandings that arose from public remarks on Kosovo status by Milorad Dodik (Spiric's party leader) adding that both he and Dodik accept Kosovo independence as the inevitable result of disastrous policies of the former Yugoslavia. Residents of the RS do not link their destiny to Kosovo and are determined to build their futures in Bosnia, Spiric said.

¶18. (C) During their private meeting, Dodik agreed with A/S Fried that Kosovo's status was not an RS issue, and noted

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that he had worked with the Ambassador over the past months to keep Kosovo from becoming political problem. Dodik asked that Bosnia not be asked to quickly recognize an independent Kosovo if this independence was not achieved by means of a Security Council resolution. A/S Fried answered that, while the US would press Bosnia on key reforms, it would not pressure them to swiftly recognize Kosovo independence achieved in this fashion. Dodik expressed a willingness to visit Kosovo before the final status decision to encourage Serbs there not to flee their houses and land in Kosovo for an uncertain future elsewhere. If the USG felt that this would be helpful, added Dodik, he was ready to undertake such a task to keep Kosovo Serbs from repeating the mistakes made by Bosnian Serbs, who at the urging of Radovan Karadzic and Momcilo Krajisnik had fled the Federation for the RS in 1996. A/S Fried said that he or the Ambassador would get back to Dodik on his suggestion.

A/S Fried Addresses Parliament

¶19. (U) In an April 4 address to Parliament, A/S Fried delivered a speech emphasizing the urgency of reform for Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic future and warning against nationalism and that the future of Bosnia cannot be built on revenge and hatred. He stressed that the United States remains a willing reform partner and would do its part to help bring Bosnia into Europe but that Bosnian leaders must determine which steps are necessary to reach that goal. The speech received nationwide coverage in print and electronic media and extensive positive attention from local commentators. A/S Fried delivered a similar message during a nationally televised interview on April 5 in Banja Luka.

American Corner, Banja Luka Base Visit

¶20. (U) At Sarajevo's American Corner, A/S Fried engaged in a discussion with Bosnian students of their concerns over the country's future and discouragement over the direction of national politics. In comments to the press at the headquarters of the Support Command of the new Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Banja Luka, Fried highlighted that successes in implementing defense reform had resulted in the decision to invite Bosnia to join the Partnership for Peace but that full implementation remained incomplete. Fried stressed that Bosnia's future lies within Euro-Atlantic institutions such as NATO and highlighted the importance of apprehending Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic.

MCELHANEY